

COMMEMORATING COMMUNITY  
BANKS OF PENNSYLVANIA

**HON. MELISSA A. HART**

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, April 20, 2004*

Ms. HART. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to commemorate the Community Banks of Pennsylvania and the more than 40,000 full- and part-time employees who have helped provide the Commonwealth with more than 170 years of financial support. I am honored to note that the Pennsylvania State Senate has designated April 19, 2004, through April 24, 2004, as "Community Banking Week."

With more than \$180 billion in assets, Community Banks recognize that when money stays in a town, it becomes a renewable resource, creating an economic cycle that constantly revitalizes and stimulates local communities. Community Banks work with the citizens in every sense of the word. These banks have made significant contributions to the economic well-being of the Commonwealth through their financial support, their dedication as good neighbors and, above all, through their service as financially sound and reliable sources of economic lifeblood in our communities.

The Community Banks have long helped in the development of our communities and of this Commonwealth as a whole. On average, 95 percent of their loan portfolio is reinvested in their own communities through residential mortgages and commercial, agricultural and student loans. Indeed, neighbors are helping neighbors build homes, save for higher education, plan for retirement and fulfill life-long dreams.

I ask that my colleagues in the House of Representatives join me in honoring this integral aspect of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's economy during Community Banker's Week. Without the continued support that the Community Banks have provided to Pennsylvania, much of the success that the Commonwealth has experienced would have been impossible.

GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA, SIKH  
LEADER, DIES—LEFT LEGACY OF  
BETRAYAL

**HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, April 20, 2004*

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I noticed in the April 3 issue of the Washington Post that Gurcharan Singh Tohra, a Sikh who led the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), the Sikhs' highest administrative body, which administers all the Sikh places of worship, called Gurdwaras, in Punjab, died April 1 in a hospital in New Delhi. He was 79 years old.

On behalf of my colleagues in the U.S. Congress, I would like to extend my sympathies to Mr. Tohra's family. In this time of loss for them, we all pray for them and for the departed. However, it is important to have the record reflect the actions that Mr. Tohra took against his own people.

The Council of Khalistan published a press release on April 6 which details the betrayal of the Sikhs by Mr. Tohra. It is excellent reading and I recommend it to my colleagues.

In that press release, the Council of Khalistan took note of Mr. Tohra's invitation to the Indian government to launch its military attack on the Golden Temple, the most sacred of Sikh shrines, in June 1984, in order to eliminate his political rival, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was a strong advocate of an independent Sikh state, Khalistan. Sikhs will be commemorating this brutal attack on June 5 here in Washington. The Indian forces simultaneously attacked 125 Sikh Gurdwaras throughout Punjab and murdered over 20,000 Sikhs in these attacks alone. They shot bullet holes in the Sikh holy scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib. They took young Sikh boys ages 8 through 13 out in the courtyard and shot them at point blank range. Meanwhile, Mr. Tohra, who had said that the tanks would have to roll over his body to get to the Temple, came out with his hands up. The Golden Temple complex is also the headquarters of the SGPC.

Mr. Tohra was also in a longstanding political alliance with the corrupt Parkash Singh Badal, who was thrown out of office after running the most corrupt government in Punjab's history—a regime so corrupt that the voters chose the Congress Party, which organized and carried out the Golden Temple attack, rather than re-elect Mr. Badal. Mr. Tohra also was an ally of the Indian government, first under the Congress Party and then under the current regime of the BJP. This is the same Indian government that has murdered over 250,000 Sikhs, Mr. Speaker. It is also holding over 52,000 Sikhs as political prisoners, some since the 1984 attacks!

With Mr. Tohra gone, new leaders must emerge. I call on my Sikh friends to make sure that these new leaders are strong supporters of freedom for the Sikhs of Punjab, Khalistan. And as the beacon of freedom, I urge the United States to take action to help liberate the Sikh Nation and all the nations seeking their freedom from India, including Kashmir, predominantly Christian Nagalim, and others.

The time has come to stop our aid to India until it respects the basic human rights of all people within its borders and to demand that India act like the democracy it says it is by holding a free and fair vote on the matter of independence for Khalistan, for Kashmir, for Nagalim, and for all the other nations seeking their freedom. This is the democratic way and self-determination is the essence of democracy. It is also the only way to prevent leaders in the mode of Gurcharan Singh Tohra from emerging again to connive with the Indian government to keep the Sikhs in slavery.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place the Council of Khalistan's press release on Mr. Tohra into the RECORD at this time.

G.S. TOHRA PASSES AWAY AT 79

WASHINGTON, DC, April 6, 2004.—Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the longtime President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which runs all the Gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) in Punjab, died of a heart attack April 1 in New Delhi. He was 79 years old.

"We offer our sympathies and prayers to Mr. Tohra's family," said Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, which leads the struggle for inde-

pendence for the Sikh homeland, Khalistan, as declared on October 7, 1987. "We pray for them in their time of loss and may Guru bless this departed soul," he said. "However, it is better to leave a legacy of service and sacrifice rather than a legacy of betrayal as Tohra did," he said. "What Tohra did in life will remain a part of the history of the Sikh Nation. He will not be remembered as a friend of the Sikh Nation," Dr. Aulakh said.

Tohra connived with the Indian government prior to its invasion of the Golden Temple, the center and seat of the Sikh religion. The Golden Temple is the headquarters of the SGPC. He joined with Harchand Singh Longowal and others in inviting the Indian government to attack the Golden Temple to murder pro-Khalistani leaders Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, General Shabeg Singh, and others, even while they were telling the Sikh Nation that Indian tanks would "have to roll over our dead bodies" to get to the Temple. From June 3 through June 6, 1984, the Indian government carried out Operation Bluestar, a military attack on the Golden Temple and over 125 other Sikh temples throughout Punjab. More than 20,000 Sikhs were killed in Operation Bluestar. Longowal was assassinated by a patriotic Sikh for his betrayal of the Sikh Nation. "Sikhs can never forgive or forget the attack on the Golden Temple," said Dr. Aulakh. On Saturday, June 5, Sikhs will gather in Washington, D.C. to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of this brutal massacre and desecration.

The Indian government has murdered over 250,000 Sikhs since 1984, more than 300,000 Christians since 1948, over 85,000 Muslims in Kashmir since 1988, and tens of thousands of Tamils, Assamese, Manipuris, Dalits, and others. The Indian Supreme Court called the Indian government's murders of Sikhs "worse than a genocide." According to a study by the Movement Against State Repression (MASR), 52,268 Sikhs are being held in illegal detention as political prisoners without charge or trial. In September 1995, human-rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra was kidnapped by police for publishing a study documenting that the Indian government secretly cremated thousands of Sikh youth by declaring them "unidentified bodies" after torturing and murdering them. He was murdered about six weeks later while in police custody. His body was never returned to his family. Police SSP Swaran Singh Ghotna murdered former Jathedar of the Akal Takht Gurdev Singh Kaunke.

Although Tohra was not corrupt like former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, he maintained an alliance with Badal, even though he once said publicly that he would not even go near Badal's grave. The Badal regime was the most corrupt in Punjab's history. In 1993, Tohra urged Sikhs to "prepare for the long struggle" to liberate Khalistan, yet he maintained a political alliance with the Indian government, first with the Congress Party (which carried out the Golden Temple attack) and then with the militant Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP.) "It seems as if there were two Gurcharan Singh Tohras," Dr. Aulakh said.

India is not one country; it is a polyglot thrown together by the British for their administrative convenience. Sikhs ruled Punjab until 1849 when the British conquered the subcontinent. Sikhs were equal partners during the transfer of power from the British. The Muslim leader Jinnah got Pakistan, the Hindu leaders got India, but the Sikh leadership was fooled by the Hindu leadership into taking their share with India on the promise that Sikhs would have "the glow of freedom" in northwest India. For that mistake, Sikhs are suffering now. "As Professor Darshan Singh, a former Jathedar of the Akal Takht, said, 'If a Sikh is not for Khalistan, he is not